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Respected Members of the California Board of Education,

Greetings! I am writing in regard to the educational standards connected with Sikhism. I am concerned that, as currently worded, the standards, inasmuch as they mention “the Brahmins and the Hindu caste order,” create a simplistic and inaccurate picture of the social situation of India and the role of Hindu thought in the maintenance of what is often called the “caste system.” Rather than being simply a Hindu phenomenon, observance of caste can be found across a wide range of religious communities in India, including Jains, Buddhists, and even Christians and Muslims. Also, many Hindu groups and movements reject or invert caste as conventionally represented in textbooks and in Sanskrit *Dharma Shastra* literature.

More to the point, such rejection and inversion was especially the case at the time of the rise of Sikhism. Sikhism is certainly a distinct and unique tradition, as members of the Sikh community strongly affirm, and this distinctiveness and uniqueness must of course be honored. It is also true, however, that the teaching of Guru Nanak, the founder of this great tradition, is part of the wider context of what are often called, in the history of Indic religions, the Sant and Bhakti movements. Both these movements, and their prominent adherents, such as Kabir (some of whose writings are included in the sacred scripture of Sikhism, the *Adi Granth*, or *Guru Granth Sahib*), rejected strong divisions between the two dominant faiths of India at the time—Hinduism and Islam—and caste divisions. Some may argue that the Bhakti movement “did not exist,” but this assertion is a distortion of contemporary scholarship, the point of which is not that no such movement existed, but that it was highly diversified and decentralized—not unlike Hinduism itself, which is not a monolith (as simplistic identifications of the caste system with it imply).

I would suggest, as a revision of the current wording, which describes Guru Nanak as “a social reformer who challenged the authority of the Brahmins and the Hindu caste order,” that the standards instead read that Guru Nanak was “a social reformer who challenged all forms of dogmatism, both Hindu and Islamic, and who rejected the Indian caste order as incompatible with the equality of all beings under God.”

I thank you for giving my suggestion all due consideration.

Sincerely,

Jeffery D. Long